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AUTHOR Sweeny, Stephen J.
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ABSTRACT

Similarities and differences in elements determining the religious character of 104 four-year Catholic colleges sponsored by women religious are examined. Literature on Catholic higher education, an analysis of college catalogs, and interviews with college presidents and the executive director of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities were used to identify elements contributing to college religious character: composition of the Board of Control, faculty, administration, the student body; theology and philosophy requirements; type of religious services; degree of accountability to the sponsoring religious congregation/diocese; environmental/discipline considerations; and use of various descriptors to express the religious character of the colleges. Changes in these elements between 1965 and 1986 were examined and findings from aid recipient colleges were compared with those of non-recipients. The study indicates profound changes occurred in the selected elements between 1965 and 1986, with no different patterns between the aid recipient and non-recipient colleges. Other findings include: (1) presidents were unequivocal in rating the importance of the elements contributing to religious character and the reasons for change in any of the elements; (2) only a very small percentage of aid recipient presidents expressed belief that the changes in some selected elements were the result of the need or desire to quality for aid; and (3) all the presidents point to several issues to explain the changes (e.g. growing emphasis on freedom, the ecumenical movement, and general permissiveness in society). Tables are included. Contains 16 references. (SM)

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Changes in Religious Orientation of Catholic Colleges: Presidential Explanations

This article is drawn from a study of state financial assistance and selected elements determining the religious orientation of the 104 four-year Catholic colleges sponsored by women religious. It examined the similarities and differences in selected elements determining the religious character of these colleges.

Stephen J. Sweeny
Senior Vice President
for Academic Affairs
College of New Rochelle
New Rochelle, N.Y. 10805

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xD. Dogma's Dilemmas:
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Texas A&M University
Department of Educational Administration
College Station, TX 77843
(409) 845-0393

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Ritz-Carlton, Buckhead in Atlanta, Georgia, November 2-5, 1989. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Religious Identity

> Amidst changing circumstances, Catholic universities and colleges are challenged to retain a lively sense of their Catholic identity and to fulfill their specific responsibilities to the Church and to society. It is precisely in doing so that they make their distinctive contribution to the wider field of higher education.
>
> The Catholic identity of your institutions is a complex and vitally important matter. This identity depends upon the explicit profession of Catholicity on the part of the university as an institution, and also upon the personal conviction and sense of mission on the part of its professors and administrators. (Pope John Paul II, 1987)

Pope John Paul II, in his meeting with representatives of Catholic higher education during his Fall 1987 visit to the United States, challenged American Catholic higher education to preserve and promote its Catholic identity. Again and again, this Pope, himself a faculty member of long standing at the University of Lublin, urges the Catholic university world to jealously guard its Catholic identity. Of particular interest to this study are the 104 four-year colleges sponsored by women religious (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities Roster, June 1988). Like their counterparts in the Catholic tradition, the colleges and universities founded by male religious and clergy, they face the challenges of preserving and promoting their Catholic identity in a pluralistic and secular culture (Schroth, 1986, p.170). These colleges are located from coast to coast and from border to border. The most recent study available on the subject reports that, in aggregate, the assets of these colleges amount to $1.5 billion with $227 million constituting the total endowment (Neylan Commission Report, 1986,

p.1). Some 3,000 women religious of 93 sponsoring congregations work in these colleges. Of these sponsoring congregations, 86% have international connections. Together the colleges serve 175,000 students and have more than 6,000,000 alumni (Driscoll, 1986, pp.2-3).

With few exceptions, colleges sponsored by women religious receive little or no operating revenues from the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. In this they do not differ from the vast majority of Catholic colleges and universities in the country. On the average, institutions of Catholic higher education receive seventy percent of their revenue from tuition and fees paid by students, ten percent from government institutional grants and appropriations, nine percent from private gifts (including whatever is donated by the sponsoring religious body), less than three percent from endowment income and about five percent from other sources. The aid received directly and indirectly by Catholic colleges and universities from state and federal grants exceeds one-half billion dollars per year (Gallin, 1986).

The question of Catholic identity presses more and more on American Catholic colleges and universities. The Roman hierarchy is unambiguous in its expectations: "The ecclesial community feels the need that the Catholic character of her Universities be more evident and powerful in order to respond better to their duty because it is precisely this character which constitutes their fundamental raison d'etre and which explains the trust accorded to them." (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1985.) Some domestic sources echo the sentiment that Catholic

colleges "...must be a source of pure Catholic teaching. To present anything less would be consumer fraud." (Clark in Goldman, 1986, D 32) Even the American champion of Catholic higher education's need for institutional automony and itegrity and independence from Rome, Notre Dame's former President Theodore Hesburgh, admonished that the "...most important factor for the future of the whole enterprise.." is to "Guard your Catholic character as you would your life." (Hesburgh, 1986, p.164) It is the presence and degree of presence of various elements of the Catholic character of Catholic higher education which the researcher sought to examine in this study.

Recognizing that, often enough, questions of both federal and state aid have depended on evidence that institutions are not "sectarian," that there is a necessary separation from ecclesiastical control, (Gallin, p.3) the researcher has been interested in pursuing what has become almost conventional wisdom on the matter, i.e., that government money fosters separation of religious heritage and college.

The related research in the field is significantly devoid of any studies associating reception of government aid with loss of Catholic identity. The few studies available indicated substantial change had taken place in Catholic higher education in the form of a collective and individual secularization (Galvin, 1971). One concluded that the reception of aid was not so much the cause of change but an attractive opportunity for the leadership of Catholic higher education to accelerate the process of change already underway (Maloney, 1974). One interesting

examination of strategic policy changes at 40 private colleges focused on their movement away from single sex status and religious identity to regain financial stability (Anderson, 1977). On the other hand, a great deal of research pointed to general societal changes and the theological, ecclesiological shifts occasioned by Vatican Council II as having deeply affected American Catholic higher education.

Soliciting Presidential Explanations

The study relied on the literature on Catholic higher education, an analysis of college cataloges and interviews with College presidents and with the Executive Director of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities to identify the elements contributing to the religious character of the colleges to be studied: the composition of the Board of Control, the Faculty, the Administration, and the Student Body, the Theology and Philosophy requirements; the nature of Religious Services; the nature and degree of accountability to the sponsoring religious congregation or diocese; environmental/ discipline considerations; and the use of various descriptors to express the religious character of the colleges. The study examined the changes in these selected elements between 1965 and 1986 and compared and contrasted the findings from the aid recipient colleges with the non-recipients. It reviewed how important the colleges considered these changes to be and compared and contrasted the findings from the aid recipient

colleges with the non-recipients.

The following are definitions used in the study:

American women religious are those female members of the American Catholic Church who, committed to a form of community and vowed life, belong to a religious order as defined by Church law (Official Catholic Directory, 1988, pp.1128-1165).

Catholic character, Religious character is the policies, practices and programs which serve to implement the institutional mission of Catholic colleges and universities. The researcher relied on an operational definition of the Catholic character of Higher Education which is drawn from the literature on Catholic Higher Education including two particularly illuminating studies (Galvin, Maloney) and an anlaysis of college catalogs to identify the elements determining the religious character of the colleges to be studied. Even though not pretending to be a comprehensive list, the elements cited are not highly selective and certain of them are not unique to Catholic higher education

Colleges sponsored by women religious are those founded by a community of women religious and still maintain some kind of relationship, however tenuous, with the members of the religious community, e.g., personnel, financial gifts, sense of the tradition, etc. (Gallin, 1983).

Direct state financial assistance is money given directly to institutions of higher education by specific states in implementation of their public policies to support independent higher education. It is also called general institutional aid. This does not include federal or state student financial aid,

tax abatement programs or relief from applicable taxes of any kind, loans for facilities or categorical funding for the advancement of specified professions or programs (Carnegie Council, 1977).

A questionnaire was constructed which aimed to identify changes between 1965 and 1986 in selected elements which determine the religious character at a given institution if such was present. The year 1965 was chosen because it was the close of the Second Vatican Council, a momentous event in the history of the modern Roman Catholic Church. In addition, the questionnaire included items to derive general information: institutional size, co-educational or single-sex population and acceptance of direct state aid. The survey instrument was also intended to elicit some attitudinal information on the contribution of the elements to religious character and reasons for change in such character.

An overall response rate of 78% was achieved.

The responses to the questionnaire items eliciting a rating of elements contributing to religious character and the reasons for any change in that character were tabulated and the use of the mean response with standard deviation provided an appropriate description of the data for the researcher's purposes.

The perceived relative importance of each specified determinant of religious character expressed in means for the two types of respondents was subjected to a t-test to determine whether any differences could be attributed to their natural

variability or to a real difference between sub-groups.

The College Presidents were asked to consider a list of elements that contribute toward the religious character of a college or university and to rate them according to a scale of one to four, unimportant to important.

On the scale of one to four (1 unimportant, 2 somewhat unimportant, 3 somewhat important, 4 important) the Presidents of the responding colleges collectively identified each of the selected elements as having a degree of importance between three and four on the scale, between somewhat important and important.

Findings

As a group, the Presidents ranked the selected elements as reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Ranking of Selected Elements Contributing Toward Religious Character of Colleges by All Presidents Responding

Selected Element	Ranking
Active campus ministry	1
The atmosphere	2
Administration	3
Tradition	4
Faculty	5
The way Theology is taught	6
Role of sponsoring religious body	7
Curriculum	8
The composition of the Board of Trustees	9
Students	10

Is there a difference in the way the Presidents of the two sub-groups, aid recipients colleges and non-recipients, perceived the importance of these factors?

There appears to be little difference between the responses of the Presidents from the two sub-groups. Aid recipients rated campus ministry higher than non-recipients; atmosphere was scored higher by non-recipients than the aid recipient Presidents. In each case, the difference was relatively small between the responses in each category and accounts for a close ranking of the elements by both sub-groups as charted in Table 2.

Table 2

Ranking of Selected Elements in Contributing Toward Religious Character of Colleges as Perceived by Presidents by Category of Colleges

Aid Recipients	Rank	Non-Recipients
Active campus ministry	1	The atmosphere
The atmosphere	2	Active campus ministry
Tradition	3	Administration
Administration	4	Faculty
Faculty*	5	Tradition
The way Theology is taught*	6	The way Theology is taught
Role of sponsoring religious body	7	Role of sponsoring religious role
Curriculum	8	Curriculum
Composition of the Board	9	Composition of the Board
Students	10	Students

* ranked equal

There was an obvious parallel of responses from the two sub-groups. While rankings differed by one place in the first few rankings, the differences were not so great as to permit the researcher to identify a different pattern of response, one

group from the other.

Having examined the differences in the Presidents' ratings of selected elements determining the religious character of colleges in the two categories, the researcher was interested in determining whether the slight differences could be attributed to their natural variability or to a real difference between the sub-groups.

Table 3 charts the results of the t-tests applied to the means of the Presidents' ratings of selected elements by category of college.

Table 3

T-Test of Means of Presidential Ratings of Selected Elements by Category of Colleges

Group 1: Non-Recipients
Group 2: Aid Recipients

Variable	# of Cases	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Err.	T Value	Variance Estimate Degree of Freedom	2-Tail Prob.
Curriculum Rating							
Group 1	46	3.4130	0.884	0.130	0.72	77	0.472
Group 2	33	3.2727	0.801	0.139			
Faculty Rating							
Group 1	48	3.6667	0.519	0.075	1.50	79	0.137
Group 2	33	3.4545	0.754	0.131			
Administration Rating							
Group 1	48	3.7083	0.504	0.073	1.48	79	0.142
Group 2	33	3.5152	0.667	0.116			
Student Rating							
Group 1	47	3.0213	0.737	0.107	0.32	78	0.752
Group 2	33	2.9697	0.684	0.119			

Continued

Table 3 - Cont'd.

Campus Ministry Rating							
Group 1	47	3.8085	0.449	0.066	-0.10	78	0.921
Group 2	33	3.8182	0.392	0.068			
Method Theology Taught Rating							
Group 1	48	3.5417	0.683	0.099	0.59	79	0.559
Group 2	33	3.4545	0.617	0.107			
Board of Trustees Rating							
Group 1	46	3.1304	0.718	0.106	0.47	77	0.642
Group 2	33	3.0606	0.556	0.097			
Atmosphere Rating							
Group 1	47	3.8511	0.360	0.052	1.97	78	0.053
Group 2	33	3.6667	0.479	0.083			
Tradition Rating							
Group 1	47	3.6383	0.605	0.088	0.25	78	0.802
Group 2	33	3.6061	0.496	0.086			
Role of Sponsoring Religious Rating							
Group 1	47	3.4468	0.717	0.105	0.54	78	0.587
Group 2	33	3.3636	0.603	0.105			

The results of the t-tests in each case are not statistically significant, although in one case around the selected element "the atmosphere," the observed significance level hovers just above the level of significance which would permit the null hypothesis to be rejected. In each case, therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. The t-tests give no evidence to believe that the null hypothesis, that the means of the Presidential ratings between the two categories do not differ, is not true.

The College Presidents were further asked to consider a list of suggested influences on the religious orientation of the

colleges being studied to discover why any changes might have occurred and to rate them on a scale of one to four, unimportant to important.

Almost 78% of the responding Presidents saw an attitude of greater permissiveness in society in general as somewhat important or important in influencing the religious orientation in the colleges being studied. In other words, 78% saw the atmosphere of general permissiveness as somehow influencing religious orientation.

A few more than half of the respondents identified the relevance of greater social concern among students and, even then, only 15% saw it as important in influencing religious orientation.

The increase in the number of lay faculty was identified as a somewhat important or important influence by almost 60% of the cases. The same level of response was given to the changing religious composition of the lay faculty. Its relevance as an influence was registered by 60% of the respondents and 25% thought it important. Just about half of the respondents saw the changing academic preparation of the religious faculty as influencing the religious orientation of the colleges. Again, about half of the respondents saw the changing religious preparation of the religious faculty as influencing the religious orientation.

The ecumenical movement was credited as influential by almost 75% of the respondents. Greater emphasis on religious freedom flowing from Vatican II was recognized by 80% of the

respondents as influential to the religious orientation of the colleges. About 45% rated it as an important influence, the second highest rating in the list of selected items. The highest rating was reserved for the broader item on freedom, greater emphasis on freedom in all its dimensions. Half of all the respondents rated this as important in influencing the religious orientation of the colleges being examined.

The growth of the institution was identified as somewhat important or important in influencing the religious orientation by about 65% of the Presidents. Much more important to the Presidents was the basic change in the understanding of what a religiously oriented institution should be. This was seen as somewhat important by 40% and important by another 41.5%.

Less than half rated getting in line academically with secular institutions as having any influence on the religious orientation. An even lower percentage, 36%, identified fiscal problems leading to attempts to qualify for governmental aid as influencing religious orientation. This was one of the lowest ratings in the entire list of selected items.

About half of the respondents rated changing attitudes toward institutions in general as having had some importance as an influence. A very high rating was given to the changing priorities of the sponsoring religious bodies with 70% indicating some importance here and to the declining resources (fiscal and personnel) of sponsoring religious bodies, rated as having an important influence by 69% of the respondents. Changing clientele expectations were seen as important influences on

religious orientation to some degree by 75% of the respondents.

Table 4 reports the ranking of these selected influences by all respondents.

Table 4

Ranking of Selected Items Influencing
Religious Orientation of Colleges by All Presidents Responding

Selected Items	Rank
Growing emphasis on freedom in all its dimensions	1
Greater emphasis on religious freedom (Vatican II)	2
Basic change in the understanding of what a religiously oriented institution should be	3
Changing clientele expectations	4
The ecumenical movement	5
General permissiveness in society in general	6
Declining resources (fiscal and personnel) of sponsoring religious bodies	7
Changing religious composition of the lay faculty	8
The growth of the institution	9
Changing priorities of sponsoring religious bodies	10
Increase in numbers of the lay faculty	11
Greater social concern among students	12
Changing attitudes toward institutions in general	13
Changing academic preparation of the religious faculty	14
Changing religious preparation of the religious faculty	15
Attempts to bring institution more in line academically with other highly reputable but secular institutions	16
Fiscal crises prompting institutions to make moves which help them qualify for governmental financial assistance	17

It is instructive to note the five highest ranked influences on religious orientation: growing emphasis on freedom; greater emphasis on religious freedom; basic change in the understanding of an institution with a religious orientation; changing clientele expectations; the ecumenical movement. Equally enlightening are the items ranked lowest as influences on religious orientation: fiscal crises prompting moves to qualify for government money; the quest for academic and reputational parity with secular institutions; changing religious and academic preparation of the religious faculty; changing attitudes towards institutions in general.

Table 5 reports the ranking of these selected items by category of college.

Table 5

Ranking of Selected Items Influencing Religious Orientation by Category of College

Aid Recipients	Rank	Non-Recipients
Growing emphasis on freedom in all its dimensions	1	Growing emphasis on freedom in all its dimensions
Basic change in understanding institution with religious orientation	2	Greater emphasis on religious freedom (Vatican II)
Greater emphasis on religious freedom (Vatican II)	3	Basic change in understanding institution with religious orientation
Declining resources of sponsoring religious body	4	The ecumenical movement

Continued

Table 5 - Cont'd.

Changing clientele expectations	5	Greater permissiveness in society
Changing priorities of sponsoring religious bodies	6	Changing clientele expectations
Greater permissiveness in society in general	7	The growth of the the institution*
The ecumenical movement	8	Changing religious composition of lay faculty*
The growth of the institution	9	Increase in numbers of the lay faculty **
Increase in numbers of the lay faculty	10	Declining resources of sponsoring religious body**
Changing religious composition of the lay faculty	11	Greater social concern among students
Changing religious preparation of the religious faculty	12	Changing priorities of the sponsoring religious bodies
Changing attitudes toward institutions in general	13	Changing attitudes toward institutions in general
Changing academic preparation of the religious faculty	14	Changing religious preparation of the religious faculty
Greater social concerns among students	15	Changing academic preparation of the religious faculty
Fiscal crises prompting moves to qualify for governmental money	16	Attempts to bring this institution more in line academically with other highly reputable but secular institutions
Attempts to bring this institution more in line academically with other highly reputable but secular institutions	17	Fiscal crises prompting moves to qualify for governmental money

* 7 and 8 are rated equal;
** 9 and 10 are rated equal

Both categories shared the top three selected elements influencing religious orientation. While there were some differences rank by rank, these appear to be minimal. Ranks seem to differ by only one or two places. Both sub-groups shared the identical lowest rankings of selected elements as well. With very minor differences, the ranking of selected elements by each of the sub-groups appears to be consistent with the rankings of all respondents as reported in Table 4.

Having examined the differences and similarities in the Presidents' rating of selected items influencing change in religious orientation, the "why" of the change as seen by the Presidents, the researcher was interested in determining whether a real difference exists between these sub-groups, aid recipients and non-recipients. Again the t-test was used to test the null hypothesis that the two population means are equal. Significance was sought at less than .05.

The results of the t-tests in each case are not statistically significant. In each case, therefore, the null hypothesis that the means of the Presidential ratings between the sub-groups do not differ is not rejected. The t-tests give no evidence that the null hypothesis is not true.

Conclusions

The overall study points to profound changes having occurred in the selected elements between 1965 and 1986. These changes did not occur in any different pattern between the aid

recipient and non-recipient colleges. There is ample evidence of shared, parallel trends and movements experienced by both groups of colleges.

The responding Presidents were unequivocal in rating the importance of the elements contributing to religious character and the reasons for change in any of these elements. There are no significant differences between the responses of the aid recipient Presidents and the non-recipient Presidents. The study does not permit the rejection of the possibility that the means of the responses of both categories of college are equal.

Only a very small percentage of aid recipient Presidents expressed the belief that the changes that had taken place in some selected elements were the result of the need or desire to qualify for aid. More than 73% of the aid recipients indicated that no changes were needed or called for.

The Presidents of all responding institutions point to a number of issues to explain the changes: growing emphasis on freedom including religious freedom; basic changes in the understanding of what religiously oriented institutions should be; changing clientele expectations; the ecumenical movement; general permissiveness in society and declining resources of the sponsoring religious body, to name but a few. The Presidents rated qualifying for governmental money the least important element explaining the changes.

Possibly, in many respects the Presidents are merely cataloging the principal features of the American culture in which institutions of Catholic higher education find themselves.

At the recent meeting of the 35 United States Archbishops with the Pope and 25 Vatican officials in Rome, Archbishop John May of St. Louis, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, spoke of the cultural context in which the American Church and religiously oriented institutions must operate:

> May I speak, then, of the cultural context in which we live and work?
>
> ...The United States is pluralistic; it enjoys total religious liberty, organized religion abounds in America, there is full freedom of thought; and the spirit of democracy runs strong...Perhaps most significant of all, the spirit of democracy courses through America and influences our lives. Authoritarianism is suspect in any area of learning or culture. Religious doctrine and moral teaching are widely judged by these criteria...(May, 1989, 679-680)

The cultural context of which Archbishop May speaks is the very context recognized by the Presidents as having influenced the changes in the religious orientation of the colleges studied.

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